

Rocks & Gravel: Early Dylan Essays

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10X Records

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The Minnesota Hotel Tapes

Minnesota Party Tape (Bonnie Beecher Tape) May 1, 1961,
Minnesota Hotel Tapes (Tony Glover Tape) Dec. 22, 1961

This is where it all began: with the first ever bootleg album. The Minnesota Hotel Tapes gained notoriety with the release of what has been deemed the first bootleg nicknamed *The Great White Wonder*. Certainly there were other underground tapes and recordings that were circulated prior to 1969, but *The Great White Wonder* was the first widely distributed of the rock 'n roll era. Incidentally the title, *The Great White Wonder*, supposedly came from the fact that the album appeared in 1969 record stores with a plain white sleeve and not a description of Dylan. Released in July of 1969, *The Great White Wonder* was comprised of the December 1961 *Minnesota Hotel Tape*, a handful of studio outtakes and a smattering of then-unreleased *Basement Tapes*. It was attributed to Trademark of Quality: as a bootleg record label based in Los Angeles California started by "Dub" Taylor and Ken Douglas.

There are three *Hotel Tapes*. The first was recorded by Dylan's then-girlfriend Bonnie Beecher on May 1st, 1961 in Minneapolis, Minnesota according to www.bobdylan.com (though that date is probably just a place holder, the exact date long-forgotten). The latter two were recorded at Beecher's apartment by friend Tony Glover in December of the same year (usually given the date of December 22nd, 1961). Bonnie Beecher's Apartment was in Dinkytown. Centered at 14th Avenue Southeast and 4th Street Southeast and spanning several city blocks along the North side of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities East, Dinkytown is a commercial district and college hangout in Minneapolis. Dinkytown became a commercial district from 1899 to 1929. According to www.dinkytownusa.org, it “was a dynamic hotbed of student activism and the counterculture through the 1970s.” According to www.punkhart.com, Bonnie Beecher's apartment in Dinkytown was known as *The Minnesota Hotel* because it was a “well known place to crash” for local and wandering musicians.

Bonnie Beecher and Dylan became friends in the late 1950s and

stayed close throughout the years. Howard Sounes biography Down the Highway: The Life of Bob Dylan, Beecher is quoted as saying, "We stayed friends for a really long time," she said. "We would always find each other."

It has been suggested that Beecher was the inspiration for Dylan's *Freewheelin'* masterpiece "Girl From the North Country." Although longtime girlfriend Suze Rotolo or Hibbing High girlfriend Echo Star Casey, nee Helstrom, have also been suggested.

In 1965, Beecher married Wavy Gravy. She had a brief acting career that wrapped up around 1968. She can be seen in "Spectre of the Gun", a 1968 episode of Star Trek: The Original Series.

Most of the songs recorded on The Minnesota Hotel Tapes are Guthrie songs, blues numbers or traditional folk songs. This was pretty much the crux of the Dylan persona in 1961.

Rock About My Saro Jane

Traditional

From The Karen Wallace Tape – May 1960

St Paul, Minnesota

Unofficial Releases: “From Minnesota To New York 1958 – 1961”
(2009) Wonderland Records, “Genuine Bootleg Series” (1995)
Scorpio

AKA Sarah Jane

Traditional, Bob Dylan

From the 1973 Columbia Records album “Dylan”

Recorded June 1, 1970, New York, NY

2nd New Morning recording session, produced by Bob Johnston.

Though the label on the original vinyl edition of “Dylan” (and his Web site) lists Dylan as the songwriter of *Sarah Jane* Dylan author Brian Hinton calls it “the only Dylan composition on the set”, one can only really attribute the arrangement to our man Bob. This is especially evident when perusing the May 1960 “Karen Wallace Tape” recorded in St. Paul, MN. Listed as “Saro Jane” or “Rock About My Saro Jane”, this early Dylan snippet shows dylan, in his full *Nashville Skyline* voice, has a familiarity with the traditional song “Saro Jane” that would serve as the basis for *Dylan's Sarah Jane*. The Wallace Tape version is a mere thirty second sample of the song, as are many recordings on this much derailed tape; many of the songs marred by overdubs of, presumably, Wallace trying to hock the tape to record labels and bootleggers for cash.

The earliest known recording of *Rock About My Saro Jane* is by Uncle Dave Mason from 1927. Mason was a early 20th century banjo player, vaudeville star and, later, star of the Grand Ole Opry. Music historian Chuck Wolfe calls Mason *the godfather of country music*. According to Wolfe, Mason claimed he learned the song from black stevedores while working along the Columbia River. Though the chorus differs from the later Dylan version, Mason's version opens the same was as Dylan's. He has a wife and five little children and he's going to take a trip on the big Macmillan. Despite being titled *Sarah Jane* on *Dylan*, Dylan also clearly sings “rock about my Saro Jane” in the chorus. Saro Jane, in the case of the folk song, is

presumed to be a boat. However, some historians believe “rock about my Saro Jane” was meant to be a sexual innuendo whereas the singer has a wife and children, but he's going to meet a woman down the river.

It is possible Dylan learned the song from Odetta's 1959 version from her Vanguard release “My Eyes Have Seen.” This would fit in the time frame of the Wallace Tape.

Of the *Dylan* compilation, much has been written—most of it negative. Dylan himself said of the songs that they were “not to be used. I thought it was well understood. They were just to warm up for a tune.” He said, “I didn't think it was that bad really.” Like *Self-Portrait*, history may regard this record more fondly, however, the reason behind its release, may negate this possibility. Released just two months before *Planet Waves*, many view *Dylan* as an attempt to cash in on Dylan's 1974 tour announcement and his move from Columbia Records to Asylum. *Planet Waves* being Dylan's *only* Asylum album, he returned to Columbia for the live album *Before the Flood* released in June of the same year. Though *Dylan* was long out-of-print, it was re-released for the digital age for the 763 song Columbia Records iTunes set “Bob Dylan: The Collection” released on August 29, 2006 on the iTunes store.

In his book *Warehouse Eyes*, Dylan author Peter James said “*Dylan* is nowhere near as bad as it could have been.” It was skewered, however, by other mainstream music critics. Jon Landau of *Rolling Stone Magazine* said in his original November 19, 1973 review: “Mr. Bojangles, Sarah Jane and Big Yellow Taxi are so bad that they inevitably repost [sic] *Self-Portrait*'s central question: What Was Bob Dylan Thinking?” The so-called *Dean of American Rock Critics* Robert Christgau wrote, “Listening to this set of rejects from what used to be Dylan's worst album does have its morbid fascination.” In a 2011 *Time* piece “The Ten Worst Dylan Songs” Gilbert Cruz writes, “*Sarah Jane* is a terribly produced song — it sounds as if Bob Dylan’s singing into a microphone that is sitting all the way on the other side of the studio. But there’s a chance that the song sounds bad on purpose.” He concludes, “And though *Sarah Jane* is the only non-cover song on the album, we bet the songwriter wishes he could pass it off as someone else’s composition.” As fate would have it, it isn't

an original after all. The *Time* list of songs should be viewed with a grain of salt. The serious *click-bait* article also names *All The Tired Horses*, *Forever Young* and *Rainy Day Women #12 and 35* among Dylan's ten worst songs. Cruz's review of *They Killed Him* from 1986's *Knocked Up Loaded* merely states, "The children's choir. That is all," as justification for its inclusion on the list. The truth is, Sarah Jane shows an unrestrained Dylan belting out a song that he has a great affection for. Not only is it not among his *ten worst* songs, it's not even among the worst songs on *Dylan*.

A more fair review might be Stephen Thomas Erlewine's on www.allmusic.com. Erlewine writes, "While Dylan is indeed a negligible album, it isn't unlistenable—it has a pleasant pop/rock sheen and Dylan sings in his Nashville Skyline croon."

Rocks and Gravel

written by Bob Dylan (Brownie McGhee, Leroy Carr)

04/63 "Freewheelin'" outtake.

Performed live only 3 times.

Available on the "True Detective: The Long Bright Dark" soundtrack (2014) - "The 50th Anniversary Collection: The Copyright Extension Collection Vol. 1" (2012-Europe) [limited edition 100 CD-rs] - "Live at the Gaslight 1962" (2005)

Unofficial releases: "Ten of Swords" (1985) Tarantula Records - "Genuine Bootleg Series" (1995) Scorpio.

This song has been performed live only three times, two of which are officially available by Columbia. The "Live at the Gaslight 1962" CD was originally released as part of an exclusive 18 month deal with Starbucks before becoming available at other retailers. It contains, as the name suggests, the highly bootlegged October 1962 live acoustic show. Dylan's July 2nd, 1962 live performance at Montreal's Finjan Club is cataloged on the first edition of the impossibly hard to find "The 50th Anniversary Collection: The Copyright Extension Collection Volume One." This set also includes two alternate takes (Takes 2 and 3) from the "Freewheelin' Outtakes." Take two, as well as the version released on "Ten of Swords" and "Genuine Bootleg Series" contains various band overdubs to Bob's original acoustic performance. As with "House of the Rising Sun" on 1995's "Highway 61 Interactive" CD-rom, drums, guitars and other instruments were added after the fact.

An early Dylan acoustic number, he was performing this as early as October 1962 for the famous Gaslight recording. This song is officially listed as "written by Bob Dylan" although various others attribute it to bluesmen Brownie McGhee and Leroy Carr. A slight blues songs indicative of the types of songs Dylan was doing in 1962 and on his first eponymous album. Rocks and Gravel is especially of note for its use of presumably overdubbed full-band instruments. Although *Corrina, Corrina* appeared first, this is, perhaps, the first *original* Dylan composition to get the full-band treatment. It's interesting to hear what the "Bob Dylan" and "Freewheelin'" albums may have sounded like if Dylan were given a back up band for all the

tracks. The full-band is a real premonition of what Dylan's blues in the mid-sixties would become.

This mostly obscure 1962 Dylan number took on a new life when T-Bone Burnett, Dylan collaborator and music supervisor for HBO's *True Detective*, included *Rocks and Gravel* on the series debut episode. In 2014, Burnett told Mother Jones that when selecting a soundtrack “it’s all about the character,” he says. “The depth of character is the breadth of music you get to use. So all I have to do is imagine what they’re listening to, and imagine the stories rattling around in their heads. How do you strengthen that? How do you make that resonate? It’s about having the songs become part of the storytelling.”

One fan online wrote that it was very strange indeed for a rural Louisiana bar in 1995 to have an unreleased Bob Dylan song somehow on their jukebox.

Red Rosey Bush

Traditional

From the Cleve Pettersen Tape

Minneapolis, Mn September, 1960

Unofficial Releases: “*Where Are You Now My Blue Eyed Son?*” 2008 (Wonderland Records Group), “*From Minnesota To New York 1958-1961*” (2009) Wonderland Records

Red Rosey Bush was one of the songs on the 1960 Cleve Pettersen Tape. Pettersen was a teenager with a reel-to-reel tape recorder who met Dylan in the coffeehouses of Dinkytown. Dylan agreed to a session *for posterity* and the two met at a 15th Ave. S.E. Apartment in Minneapolis. The recordings were solely possessed by Pettersen until 2005 when he donated the then-uncirculated tape to the Minnesota Historical Society Library. The folks at the Bob Dylan *Bringing It All Back Home* Page Web site call the Pettersen tape “the first *true* Dylan tape we have,” calling it “recognizably Dylan and the style and selection of songs closer to what we normally think of when we talk about the early years.”

The song itself is most-often cited as being a traditional song in the public domain. However, according to William Ruhlman's *Goldmine* essay “A Song To Sing All Over This Land”, Peter Paul and Mary's Mary Travers said differently. “*Red Rosey Bush* is a wonderful song,” she said. “*Red Rosey Bush* is not a traditional song. It was written by [folksinger and song collector] John Jacob Niles.”

Dylan's version is slight and less-flowery than his contemporary's versions. The song was performed by Harry Belafonte on *Belafonte Returns to Carnegie Hall*, recorded May 2, 1960 and by Jo Stafford on *Jo Stafford Sings American Folk Songs*. It was also sung by Andy Griffith on *The Andy Griffith Show* in the episodes *Three's A Crowd* and *Man in the Middle*.

Mule Skinner Blues (Blues Yodel No. 8)

Written by Jimmy Rodgers and George Vaughan

Recorded May 1960 "The Karen Wallace Tape"

September 1960 Hugh Brown's Apartment
and July 2, 1962 at the Finjan Club, Montreal, QC

Available on: The 50th Anniversary Collection: The Copyright
Extension Collection, Volume 1 (Sony, 2012)

Unofficial releases: "*From Minnesota To New York 1958-1961*"
(Wonderland Records, 2009), "*Freight Train Blues Vol. 2*" (Top
Tracks, 2012), "*Finjan Club 1962*" (Marmot Music, 2012)

Mule Skinner Blues or *Blues Yodel No. 8* first became a hit for country singer/songwriter Jimmy Rodgers in 1930. It has been covered and performed by 35 high-profile musicians since that time. In addition to Dylan's version, the song had been previously performed by folkies like Odetta, Ramblin Jack Ellion, Woody Guthrie and Logan English. Perhaps Dylan learned the song, like so many others, from Woody Guthrie's sparse version. The Guthrie version became the title track for the Moses Asch/Smithsonian collection "*Mule Skinner Blues: The Asch Recordings Vol. 2*" - A collection of mostly traditional or cover songs performed and recorded by Guthrie. The most famous version, beyond Rodger's own, was recorded by The Fendermen, an American rockabilly duo, in 1960. It reached #5 on the Billboard charts. This off-kilter version was used as the theme to radio shock jock Don Geronimo's short-lived Delaware talk-radio program on WGMD-FM in 2009. "Good Morning, Captain!" Muleskinner, as it turns out, is a slang term for a muleteer or an arriero. In reality, a mule skinner is a person who transports goods like coffee and cork, using pack animals. Unlike a muskrat skinner who will skin and tan the hide of a muskrat, often hanging them on the side of their muskrat tanning shack, a mule skinner does not actually skin mule. You learn something everyday, Captain.

The song, though credited to Jimmy Rodgers, bares a striking similarity to a composition by little-known bluesman Tom Dickenson. Dickenson is known for only writing four songs including "Worry Blues" and a song called "Labor Blues". *Labor Blues* shares a similar first stanza to *Mule Skinner Blues*. Such is often the case in early

blues and folk music, the borrowing and adapting of music, lyrics and themes is prevalent. This is what makes it difficult to trace the definitive origins of roots music. Often times, whoever scores the first copyright is credited as the writer. A classic example is the copyright claim by Warner/Chappell over *Happy Birthday* which wasn't overturned until 2016. The melody to *Happy Birthday* is credited to 19th century sisters Patty and Mildred Hill. Patty, a schoolmarm, used the song to welcome her Kindergartners to class with the lyrics *good morning to all, good morning to all, good morning dear children, good morning to all*. That didn't stop Warner from making millions on the song that should have been in the public domain for 80 years. *Mule Skinner* is seen as a song with great historical significance. According to theologian and writer Fred Sanders “some people claim there is no song more representative of country music’s tangled history—few songs, perhaps, more representative of the entire tangle of American music history—than “Muleskinner Blues (Blue Yodel No. 8).”

Dylan's first known performance of *Mule Skinner Blues* comes from the controversial *Karen Wallace Tape*. It is one of the longer uninterrupted songs on the hodge-podge cut and paste tape. Dylan's voice is lower than you'd expect becoming the source for some doubt over the validity of the recording though it's more likely the tape was either recorded at the wrong speed or it was transferred thus. The version on *The Hugh Brown Tape* recorded at the apartment of Hugh Brown in September of the same year has the opposite problem. It plays too fast and it is much shorter at just under a minute. On many releases, this version is referred to as “Blues Yodel No. 8”. The most interesting recordings of these songs come from Dylan's July 1962 performance at the Finjan Club on Victoria Street, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

The Finjan club tapes are notable for being of excellent sound quality, recorded by Montréal musician Jack Nissenson on an old British reel-to-reel recorder. The eleven songs are a mix of folk songs, songs and outtakes from the first Columbia *Bob Dylan* LP and originals such as a very early version of the seminal *Blowin' In The Wind*. The show is also Dylan's first known concert outside of the United States. According to the owner of Finjan Club, Shimon Ash (quoted on many online sites but without source attribution), Dylan was paid just \$12

for the performance and provided a “place to crash for two weeks before he headed off to New York.”

“I haven't sung this for a while,” Dylan says during the first take after Bob coughs about half way through while trying to find the key. At the end of the track he asks for a capo and a C Harmonica. Take two is a much more confident rendition in a lower key. This sounds like typical early period Dylan until he breaks out into a yodel, laughs and lowers the key of the song once again. He mentions playing it in E. He finishes the attempt by proclaiming, “I can't do it.” Contrast this with folk-singer Logan English's fabulous version on his “American Folk Ballads” from the same year. English later was instrumental in Dylan's early career, helping him secure his first gig in Greenwich Village. At this point, it was apparent that Dylan's contemporaries had a few years head start on the genre.

The Finjan show was released in its entirety on an odd collection called *The 50th Anniversary Collection: The Copyright Extension Collection, Volume 1*. Released four days before the end of 2012, this is a four CD-R 86 song set that compiled recordings from 1962 that would imminently enter the public domain in Europe. According to European copyright law, recordings older than 50 years enter into public domain if released before 1963. That year it changes to 70 years after production. Therefore, a recent release/new version would bump back that date, presumably, another 50 years. On the issue of copyright, a source from Sony told Rolling Stone magazine in 2013: “It basically said, ‘If you haven’t used the recordings in the first 50 years, you aren’t going to get any more.’” The collection was limited to only 100 copies and packaged in a brown paper bag available only in Europe. The collection compiles live recordings like Finjan and The Gaslight as well as outtakes from *Freewheelin'* and other earlier recordings such as the *Mackenzie Home Tapes*.

Bob had said that Hibbing was a good place to leave. - John Bucklen
1993

The John Bucklen Tape

Recorded by John Bucklen - March 1958

Bob Dylan's bedroom, 2425 Seventh Avenue, Hibbing, MN

Recorded September 1960

Bob Dylan's home, Minneapolis, MN

Unofficial Releases: "*I Was So Much Younger Then*" 2000

(Dandelion), "*Where Are You Now My Blue Eyed Son?*" 2008

(Wonderland Records Group)

Young Bob Dylan was a bull-shitter. He was a myth-creator. He told People magazine in 1975: "I didn't consciously pursue the Bob Dylan myth. It was given to me by God. Inspiration is what we're looking for. You just have to be receptive of it." He said, "I don't care what people expect of me. Doesn't concern me. I'm doin' God's work. That's all I know."

Yet, as early as 1958, Dylan was spinning a colorful tale of his past. Of his Hibbing, MN days, he told Cynthia Gooding from WBAI-FM's *Folksinger's Choice*, "At the time I was sort of doing nothing. I was working, I guess, I was making pretend. I was going to school out there--I'd just come in from South Dakota...I'd come in from Sioux Falls." He said, "I was with the carnival off and on for six years," he said. "I was clean-up boy. I was main-liner on the Ferris wheel. Do the shoreline thing."

When discussing where Dylan picked up his songs, during his first radio interview on "Folk Song Festival", WNYC-FM, October 29, 1961, Dylan told presenter Oscar Brand, "This here song is a good example, I learned it from a farmer in South Dakota, he played the autoharp, his name was Wilbur, lived outside of Sioux Falls I was there visiting people and him and heard him do it. I was looking through a book one time and I saw the same song and remembered how he did it."

In reality, Bob Dylan was born on May 24, 1941, in Duluth,

Minnesota, and spent his formative years through high-school in Hibbing, Minnesota, on the Mesabi Range west of Lake Superior.

John Bucklen, one high-school year his junior, met Robert Zimmerman at Hibbing High. He told the BBC in 1993, "Bob and I went to high-school together. He was about a year ahead of me at school. During from 1957 through 1958 we became friends and had a common interest in music." He said, "it was kind of a bleak time to live but it wasn't really that bad as long as we had friendship and music." "We spent time up in his bedroom playing guitar and practicing and pretending that we were big recording artists, it was your typical teenager rock fantasy that for one of us came true."

Bucklen knew that young Dylan had grander aspirations. "Bob had said that Hibbing was a good place to leave and at time it really was. It just seemed to a person growing up at that time that Hibbing wasn't a place to stick around," Bucklen said.

Speaking of his time in Hibbing, In the 2005 Martin Scorsese directed documentary *No Direction Home*, Dylan remarked: "when i began listening to the radio I began to get bored of being there. But up until i heard the stuff coming over the radio, I don't really remember being bored."

John Bucklen and Dylan began playing together in high-school. When they were reunited backstage at a Dylan show in 1989, Dylan reportedly said "I've known this guy longer than I've known anyone."

Soon after Dylan and Bucklen met, connected by their love of music, they became fast friends. Bucklen said, "we started a couple rock groups; used to play the Armory and other places. We were the Rockets and then the Satintones. 'The Satintones' were a rock group! Oh man!"

"Half the people there thought he was good and to the other half he was the funniest thing they'd ever seen in their life. I admired him because he had the guts to do what he felt like. Can you imagine trying to get across black soul music to white teenagers in Hibbing, Minnesota, in 1955?" Bucklen said.

"I started playing guitar, pretty early on actually, maybe when I was about 10 or 11, we found a guitar. I found something else in there that has kind of mystical overtones. The people who had lived in the house previous to that time, they had left some of their furniture and among some of that furniture was a great big mahogany radio, it was like a jukebox, it had a 78 turntable when you opened up the top and i opened it up one day and there was a record. A country record on there. a song called Drifting Too Far From Shore... I played the record and it brought me into a different world," Dylan said.

One day in March 1958, Dylan and Bucklen set up a Sears Silvertone reel-to-reel mono recorder on the Zimmerman family piano and recorded the duo "joking around," singing songs, performing skits and faux interviews. Placed in Bucklen family storage, Bucklen's mom saved the ten reel-to-reel tapes.

What results is an avant-grade masterpiece. The unearthed *John Bucklen Tape* features, perhaps by accident/perhaps by design, a collection of songs, skits, sounds and wailing that can only be described as punk, art and noise. It's comparable to The Beatles' *Pantomime* or the The Residents of 1970s. The skits feature Dylan and Bucklen taking on other roles. One features Bucklen as a country music fan arguing with Dylan as an R&B fan. "When you hear a song like Johnny Cash, what do you want to do? You want to leave," he jokes. "When you hear a song like, some good rhythm and blues songs, you want to cry when you hear one of those songs."

In 2006, Bucklen (then an XM Radio host) said he and Dylan were only concerned with music. Speaking of Dylan's perceived politics on his early 60s *finger-pointing songs*, Bucklen said "I was surprised when he came out to be such a strong spokesperson for many of the causes in the movement. When I knew him, we weren't political at all. We never talked about causes."

In November of 1960, Dylan had decided to it was time to ramble on. He had plans to hitchhike to the East Coast to see Woody Guthrie and during a snowstorm, no less.

Dylan did ask Bucklen to join him. "I told him I'd pass and I went and joined the Air Force. I liked airplanes," Bucklen said. Bucklen told

the Fort Du Lac Reporter in 2006 "I have no regrets about it, but I've always been kind of curious to know how things would have turned out if I'd gone out there with him."

What remains of their legacy is an odd assortment of music and sounds and the earliest recordings of a teenager that would go on to become Bob Dylan. It's important historically for that reason alone but it's infinitely relatable if you made tapes like this with your high school friends—never to be heard except in your memories.

Though he told *The Telegraph* in 1965 "When I left there, man, I knew one thing: I had to get out of there and not come back." Dylan has returned to Hibbing from time to time over the years. In 1969, Dylan and then-wife Sara Marlin Noznisky attended the Hibbing High-School 1959 ten year class reunion at the Moose Lodge, at 1510 Howard Street.

Classmate Sharon Kepler, quoted in *The Telegraph* in 2009, said "My memory of that is of Bob standing in one corner and of people going up and shaking his hand. I didn't like that....I would have been happier if he had just been able to sit down and be one of our classmates." Another classmate, Karen Lindall, Another student, Karen Lindall said, "He kissed me on the cheek!" Apparently, some other Hibbingites took umbrage with Dylan's previously publicized thoughts on the small town and confronted him. The Dylans left shortly thereafter.

In 1988 Denny Rice, music director of local FM—WMFG, told the Chicago Tribune "I don't think they would know him (Dylan) if he walked up to them." Somehow, I have a hard time believing that.

When I Got Troubles

written by Bob Dylan

1959 – Home Recording

Recorded by Ric Kangas

Available on: The Bootleg Series Vol. 7 – No Direction Home: The Soundtrack (2005)

It runs one and half minutes. It is, as of yet, the earliest recording of Dylan that has been officially released and Brian Hinton calls it *probably Dylan's first composition* (although there are earlier recordings to have surfaced, see the *John Bucklen Tape*). Dylan high-school chum John Bucklen told the BBC's Tales Of Rock 'n' Roll in 1993: "It was difficult to tell what songs he wrote and what songs he didn't write. Because sometimes I discovered he said he wrote a song and he didn't and then other times I thought he did not write a song and he did. So, it was difficult to say." Recorded sometime in 1959, when Dylan was still a teenager in Minnesota, *When I Got Troubles* showcases a young Bob Dylan rightly on his way to finding his voice.

One wants to call this a Bobby Zimmerman tape because of it's naivete and vulnerability, however it is said that Bobby Zimmerman became Bob Dylan shortly before this recording was made.

According to Daniel Mark Epstein's biography, "The Ballad of Bob Dylan," the name and persona change happened when Zimmerman was 17 to 18-years-old. Epstein wrote that as early as 1958 Zimmerman had told friends and girlfriend that he'd be changing his name to Bob Dillion.

It wasn't that long beforehand that Zimmerman was fronting his 1950s rock band *The Golden Chords* influenced by the likes of Elvis and Little Richard. *When I Got Troubles* is a distant blood relative to those rockabilly/blues days. It is, if not expertly played, delta blues all the way. It is remarkable that this true buried treasure of a very early Dylan composition cropped up on the soundtrack to the 2005 Scorsese documentary film. Scorsese's document's Dylan's move to New York in 1961 through his tumultuous year of 1966. The soundtrack, volume 7 of the acclaimed *Bootleg Series*, was compiled with the help of director Scorsese. It features mostly unreleased material from the same time frame.

When I Got Troubles was recorded by another Dylan high-school friend and musician Ric Kangas. According to Kangas, who spoke with *The Hibbing Daily Tribune* in 2006, Dylan and Kangas bonded over their interest in rock 'n roll, blues and Hank Williams. They would exchange records and record songs. The songs were recorded on Kangas' reel-to-reel recorder with a high-end Shure microphone. The quality of the equipment is apparent on the relatively decent sounding home recording. In addition to *I Got Troubles*, the pair recorded several other songs with Dylan either signing, singing backup or playing guitar. *The Kangas Tape* went to auction in 2006.

Jesus Christ

aka *Jesus Was a Man*

written by: Woody Guthrie

From the Cleve Pettersen Tape

Minneapolis, Mn September, 1960

Unofficial Releases: “*Where Are You Now My Blue Eyed Son?*” 2008 (Wonderland Records Group), “*From Minnesota To New York 1958-1961*” (2009) Wonderland Records

based on:

Jesse James

traditional

From the Gleason Tape

East Orange, NJ Feb/Mar 1961

Unofficial Releases: “*Dylan's Roots*” 2009 (Skeleton), “*Gleason Home Tape*” n.d.,

The song *Jesus Christ* was written by Woody Guthrie in 1940. The lyrics were new but the melody was borrowed from the traditional song *Jesse James* which portrays the outlaw as a Robin Hood-like figure. Guthrie's *Jesus Christ* paints Christ in a similar Robin Hood mold, singing that Jesus preached about giving money to the poor. The song comes to an end proclaiming that if Jesus were alive in a capitalist present, the property owners and soldiers would crucify him for preaching about charity. The liner notes for Guthrie's 1956 Folkways compilation album *Bound For Glory: The Songs and Story of Woody Guthrie*, Guthrie is quoted as saying: "I wrote this song looking out of a rooming house window in New York City in the winter of Nineteen and Forty. I thought I had to put down on paper how I felt about the rich folks and the poor ones."

Dylan's version, his only known performance of the song, was recorded in Minneapolis by Bonnie Beecher on the Cleve Pettersen Tape. Chreyl Reitan of www.mnartists.org spoke to Weisman Museum curator Colleen Sheehy about the museum's 2004 Dylan exhibit. "This tape is recorded in Dinkytown in a friend's apartment," Sheehy said. "On it you hear Dylan goofing around and joking. It's

really funny. He has a repartee. This is when he was becoming a folk singer.”

Dylan's discovery of Woody Guthrie's solo material in the late 1950s was something of an epiphany for the young rock 'n roller. In Chronicles, Dylan writes: “My life had never been the same since I’d first heard Woody on a record player in Minneapolis a few years earlier. When I first heard him it was like a million megaton bomb had dropped.” One of those 78 records was Guthrie's recording of *Jesus Christ*. “All these songs together, one after another made my head spin. It made me want to gasp. It was like the land parted,” Dylan wrote. “Woody made each word count. He painted with words.”

According to Ross Altman, writing for www.folkworks.org in May/June 2007, when Dylan finally ventured to the East Coast to visit Guthrie, Guthrie imparted some sage advice to young Dylan. He supposedly said, “Kid don't worry about writing songs, work on your singing.”

The song *Jesus Christ* is based on is a 19th century folk song about Jesse James. Though the song is traditional and passed into the public domain, there are some claims as to it's authorship. The version Dylan sings contains lyrics stating “This song was written by Billy Gashade.” According to author D.K. Wilgus, Frank James's son said *Billy Gashade* was a reporter in Liberty, Missouri.

Dylan recorded *Jesse James* about a half a year after he recorded *Jesus Christ*. Another song learned from Guthrie, *Jesse James* is slightly slower and more mournful. However, Dylan's version only consists of the last verse and is under a minute long. He recorded it in East Orange, NJ at the home of Bob and Sidsel Gleason. The Gleasons visited Woody Guthrie in the hospital often. They even took him into their home for weekend visits. After time, according to Joe Klein's Woody Guthrie—A Life, their home became somewhat of “a youth hostel for wandering folk singers.” Dylan stayed there after his move from Minnesota. Dylan recorded a collection of mostly Woody Guthrie covers now widely know as *The East Orange Tape* and *The Gleason Tape*.

Jenny, Jenny

Written by: Little Richard, Enotris Johnson

Recorded by John Bucklen - March 1958

Bob Dylan's bedroom, 2425 Seventh Avenue, Hibbing, MN

Unofficial Releases: "*I Was So Much Younger Then*" 2000

(Dandelion), "*Where Are You Now My Blue Eyed Son?*" 2008

(Wonderland Records Group)

When Dylan and his friends played *Jenny Jenny* at the high-school talent show on February 6, 1958, it was still a new song on the radio. Recorded in 1956, *Jenny* appears on Little Richard's 1957 debut album *Here's Little Richard*. Debuting June 19, 1957 (the same week Pat Boone's *Love Letters in the Sand* sat at number one), the song went on to reach number ten on the US Billboard Hot 100. It's of note that the album included other rock 'n roll trailblazers like *Tutti Frutti* and a song a The Beatles would ignite: *Long Tall Sally*. *Jenny Jenny* has been covered by Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones

It seems, musically, young Bobby Zimmerman and Little Richard were kindred spirits. In 1970, Little Richard told Rolling Stone, "I came from a family where my people didn't like rhythm & blues. Bing Crosby... Ella Fitzgerald was all I heard. And I knew there was something that could be louder than that, but didn't know where to find it. And I found it was me."

It was louder. During the talent show, it is said that Zimmerman was so enthusiastic that broke one of the Steinway piano's pedals. You can hear the energy on *The Bucklen Tape*. Pounding the piano keys, Dylan actually sounds tame compared to the Little Richard version. Following a 20-second rehearsal snippet, Bucklen and Zimmerman mock bicker about the speed of the song. "Listen, man you gotta to do it a little bit faster than that," Bucklen said. Zimmerman responds, "I can't help it." "I know it ain't slow but it's not fast enough too," Bucklen said. Zimmerman tells him, "Whadaya talking about, man, that's plenty fast!" Bucklen said, "No, it isn't."

Hey Little Richard (AKA Little Richard)

Recorded by John Bucklen - March 1958

Bob Dylan's bedroom, 2425 Seventh Avenue, Hibbing, MN

Available on: 26 second snippet in the film *No Direction Home* (Paramount, 2005)

Unofficial Releases: “*I Was So Much Younger Then*” 2000 (Dandelion), “*Where Are You Now My Blue Eyed Son?*” 2008 (Wonderland Records Group)

In Tim Dunn's book The Bob Dylan Copyright Files 1962-2007, Dunn calls *Hey Little Richard* the earliest known Dylan composition to date. What is in the public is a mere thirty-six second clip with Bob Dylan on piano and screaming about Little Richard with John Bucklen singing background vocals. If you've ever wondered what some of Bob's early rock 'n roll bands may have sounded like, this is as close as it gets.

In his folk-singing days Dylan downplayed those rock 'n roll roots, although he has since embraced them. “My favorite rock 'n roll performer was the inimitable Little Richard and I played all of his songs, they were easy enough to play and I'd scream them out,” Dylan said in the 2005 Martin Scorsese documentary *No Direction Home*.

In his 1986 book No Direction Home, author Robert Shelton recounts a conversation with Le Roy Hoikkala, one of young Dylan's band-mates. “We were in eighth grade,” he said. “Bob played rhythm and sang.” He said that they decided to call themselves *The Golden Chords*. “Bob really idolized Little Richard then. He could chord quite well on the piano,” he said.

In his 1959 Hibbing High School yearbook, The quote next to the straight-laced photograph of a young Robert Zimmerman said of his ambitions: *To join “Little Richard”* (also noted were his memberships in Latin Club 2 and Social Studies Club 4).

In Hibbing in 1956, Zimmerman and friends Larry Fabbro, Chuck

Nara and Bill Marinac performed at Hibbing High's Jacket Jamboree Talent Festival. Mike Dwyer, one of Zimmerman's classmates, told the *Telegraph* "We all had to go. We were all assigned seats. He was singing a Little Richard tune - the principal pulled the curtain on him." He said, "People in this town, they weren't real receptive to him. I think they were jealous of him, or didn't think he was talented enough." Later in life, Principal Kenneth Pederson told Jill Ross that he "was not going to allow obscenity like that to be displayed on a stage that Guy Lombardo had performed on!"

In No Direction Home, another Hibbing student recalled, "Bobby was just ahead of things. We might have thought that day that he was kind of nuts, even though we always thought he was a nice kid."

In 1969, Dylan high school friend John Bucklen remembered, "My first impression was embarrassment. Our little community was unaccustomed to such a performance. I think a lot of people were embarrassed too. I realize now, of course, that there was the young Bob Dylan in his very early form. He was a little bit ahead of everyone."

Hangknot, Slipknot

Written by: Woody Guthrie

Indian Neck Folk Festival, Branford, Ct, May 6, 1961

Official releases: Unreleased

Unofficial releases: The Forgotten Sessions 1962-1963 (Sessions) 2017, Ten Million a Week (Hollow Horn) 2007, I Was So Much Younger Then (Scouser/Dandelion) 2000, From Minnesota to New York (Wonderland) 2009

Hangknot, Slipknot (sometimes just written as *Slipknot*) is not one of Woody Guthrie's most-written about songs but it is plenty powerful. *Old Friends: A Songobiography* Blogger Elijah Wald wrote in 2016: "it's just a string of questions, a decent man asking what this thing is, and why." It's a song about hangings and loose laws. It is about lynching and the disposable human life. Once again, Guthrie's stark vocals are biting in a matter-of-fact way. It is chilling. Guthrie's version landed on the forth and final volume of The Smithsonian Folkways' Asch Recordings. Volume 4, subtitled *Buffalo Skinners*, is said to feature "songs about cowboys, outlaws, and other western themes." It is also available on the 2012 release *Woody at 100: The Woody Guthrie Centennial Collection*.

Slipknot is one of three Woody Guthrie songs Dylan performed during a three song set at the Motowesi Hotel in Branford, CT at the 1961 Indian Neck Folk Festival. It's a charming performance. Dylan begins the song by saying "this is Woody Guthrie's *Talkin' Dustbowl*." After a few moments of guitar and harmonica fill, he switches up and says "No, this is Woody Guthrie's *Slipknot*," eliciting a smattering of laughter from the crowd. He tells the room "there are about five or six hangman songs, this is the best one." During the recording you can hear either objects or doors slamming. There is a bit of clapping that is likely coming from Dylan's feet. This show helped further the idea that a young Bob Dylan was the next Woody Guthrie. The first time Dylan was written about by Time magazine was November, 23 1962. The cover featured a stylized painting of Joan Baez and was accompanied by her name and a simple headline: *Folk Singer*. Of Dylan, Time magazine wrote: "The tradition of [Big Bill] Broonzy and Guthrie is being carried on by a large number of

disciples, most notably a promising young hobo named Bob Dylan. He is 21 and comes from Duluth” They continue, “he delivers his songs in a studied nasal that has just the right clothespin-on-the-nose honesty to appeal to those who most deeply care.” However, at the Indian Neck show, Dylan's voice was strong and decidedly less-nasal. It was the voice that he'd use on many pre-*Freewheelin'* recordings. If judged on the audience response alone, his reading of *Slipknot* was a strong performance. The crowd very much enjoyed this song. His performance is slightly faster than Guthrie's original and lacks Guthrie's guitar flourishes.

Bob Dylan's Talking Blues

Recorded 1960-1963

Various Locations

The *Talking Blues* is a format that has become sort of synonymous with Dylan's folk-hero Woody Guthrie in the 1940s, however, the style's roots have been obscured by history. It's "surface roots", according to NRP's *All Things Considered*, date back to a recording of a song called "Talking Blues" by the Greenville Trio in April 1926. They contend, "[Talking Blues] lineage goes much deeper — to spirituals — and an odd combination of the religious and the profane."

The liner notes to the Smithsonian Folkways 1958 John album entitled *Talking Blues* by singer and folklorist John Greenway identify the 1926 song "Talking Blues" by a balding, bespectacled, pipe-smoking man from Greenville, South Carolina named Chris Bouchillon as the "*original*" *talking blues tune*.

The Greenville Trio, Charley, Uris, and singer/mandolin player Chris Bouchillon, went to Atlanta to record a handful of songs. The recording director of this session later claimed to have had a part in the creation of the talking blues. According to author Charles Wolfe, the recording director said "[Bouchillon] came to see me down in Atlanta. I listened to him and thought he was pretty awful. I thought the singing was the worst thing I had heard, but I liked his voice. I liked the way he talked to me. I said: 'Can you play guitar while you're talking?' He said, 'Yes.' So I said, 'Let's do it, let's fool around with something like that.' He had a little thing called a 'blues thing' and he tried to sing it. I said, 'Don't sing it, just talk it. Tell them about the blues but don't sing it.'"

By the 1940s, when Guthrie took up the mantle of the Talking Blues, it had largely become a comedic form of country music. Though still with a heavy dose of wry comedy in his dry Okie drawl, it was Guthrie, and his ilk, that converted the musical form into a vessel of political speech. Guthrie has been called the *father-of-the-talking-blues*, which is incorrect. He may, however, be the father of the talking blues as a form of political speech via protest song or as a 1963 Dylan might call them: *finger-pointing songs*. Dylan's own

Talking Blues compositions include as much comedy as social commentary.

A rather banal description from the Internet defines Talking Blues as *a form of folk music and country music. It is characterized by rhythmic speech or near-speech where the melody is free, but the rhythm is strict.* Forum.emusictheory.com's JonR expands the definition, *"It's a very narrow format. What they all have in common is the same G-C-D chord progression, much the same tempo and guitar style, with the D chord commonly held a little longer to accommodate some extra lyrics as commentary beyond the pair of rhyming couplets that make up most verses. The lyrics are spoken in a kind of sing-song style."*

Dylan's first documented performance of a *Talking Blues* number dates back to his pre-Columbia days—to 1960.

Talking Merchant Marine

AKA Talking Sailor

Written by: Woody Guthrie

Hugh Browne's apartment Minneapolis, Mn, Sep 1960; *recorded by Cleve Pettersen*

Official releases: Unreleased

“Got some seamen in the house tonight (laughter)—Here's another one by Woody, I haven't done this one in a long time.” - Bob Dylan, introduction to *Talking Merchant Marine*, November 4th, 1961

Unofficial releases: Song to Woody (live) (n.l.) 2014, The Wild And Rambling Boy 1961-1962 (Wonderland), I Was So Munch Younger Then (Dandelion) 2000, Carnegie Chapter Hall 1961 (Chrome Dreams) 200?

Woody Guthrie wrote and sang many maritime songs. According to Master Mariner Kelly Sweeney, *Talking Merchant Marine* is “the story of a working mariner and the hope that his ship will make it safely past the deadly Nazi U-boats.” Guthrie served in the Merchant Marine and the Army during World War 2. Detailed in his song “Seamen Three,” Guthrie's was even joined by his friends Cisco Houston and Jimmy Longhi on several voyages. According to woodyguthrie.org, Longhi said, “When they (Cisco and Woody) asked me to ship out with them, I was honored, thrilled, and terrified. I was trapped between two heroes. I felt like a slice of salami in a hero sandwich.” Along with songs like “All You Fascists Bound To Lose” and “The Biggest Thing That Man Has Ever Done,” *Talking Merchant Marine* is one of hundreds of anti-hitler and pro-war songs composed with Guthrie. Guthrie's version was recorded by Moses Asch (likely in 1944) for the Asch Record Company's *Asch Album* #347. However, some theorize that Dylan first heard these songs from the popular John Greenway Folkways 1958 album “Talking Blues,” considered to have been more accessible at the time. In Greenway's “Talking Blues” liner notes, folklorist Kenneth Goldstein wrote “In [*Talking Sailor*] Guthrie writes from his own experience, for, as a member of the Merchant Marines during World War II, he shipped out frequently on Liberty ships and other cargo vessels,” He wrote, “this song ends up as a pitch for on of the numerous unions to which

Guthrie belonged during his many years as a *jack-of-all-trades*.”

There are two existing performances of Talking Merchant Marine. It was first recorded at (presumably) Hugh Browne's apartment on 15th Avenue, Southeast Minnesota in September of 1960. It was recorded by Cleve Pettersen on a Realistic reel-to-reel tape recorder on Realistic tape. The recording captures a quick seemingly impromptu Dylan performance with his group of friends. According to the Minnesota Historical Society, that group of friends includes Petersen, Bil Golfus, Bonne Beecher and Cynthia Fisher. On the short recording that fizzles out at the end with Dylan proclaiming, “Aw hell, I can't do it,” the gang of friends can be heard singing along. *Talking Merchant Marine* is a song the group is familiar with. Seemingly more familiar with *Merchant Marine*, the recording commences where the previous *Talking Columbia* trails off after less than 41 seconds.

The other known recording comes from Dylan's Carnegie Chapter Hall performance from November 4th, 1961. Although several of the songs from this performance have seen the light of day, Dylan's *Talking Merchant Marine* supposedly wasn't unearthed until May 2008. Though not his first New York gig, it was almost certainly his first gig since signing with Columbia Records nine days prior. Though the room had a one hundred person capacity, Dylan performed for a crowd of just 53 paying customers. This particular song's influence can be heard on later Dylan songwriting, most notably his “Talking Bear Mountain Picnic Massacre Blues.” Strikingly, the song's phrasing, lyrics and terminology are certainly familiar.

Talking Lobbyist
AKA Talking Inflation Blues

Written by: Tom Glazer

Originally published in (supplement to No. 3, Apr-May 1946 issue) of "People's Songs" against the proposed abolition of the Office of Price Administration (OPA).

Recorded on the Minnesota Party Tape, Minneapolis, MN, Autumn 1960

Official releases: Unreleased

Unofficial releases: I Was So Much Younger Then
(Scouser/Dandelion) 2000, Where Are You Now My Blue Eyed Son?
(Wonderland) 2008, From Minnesota To New York 1958-1961
(Wonderland) 2009 [Speed Corrected Version]

Tom Glazer was a folk-singer and a songwriter whose biggest claim to fame was penning the lyrics to "On Top of Spaghetti" sung to the tune of "On Top of Old Smokey" in 1963. Although, the song almost certainly existed before then. One year earlier in 1962, Sharon Ruth with Sharon and the lollipops published the song first where Ruth and Philip Anders are listed as the songwriters. It can't, however, be argued that Glazer's 1963 version with the Do-Re-Mi Children's Chorus is the most famous *recording* of the song. Even his 2003 New York Times obituary implies this common error: "Tom Glazer, a folk singer and songwriter best known for his whimsical children's songs -- particularly one about a mountain of spaghetti -- died on Friday at his home in Philadelphia. He was 88."

Despite being remembered for a song he didn't really write, Glazer was recognized in the folk community as something more. Canadian folksinger and radio presenter Oscar Brand, host of *Oscar Brand's Folksong Festival* which ran continuously for 70 years beginning in 1945, said Grazer was a skilled guitarist. He said Glazer was such a fine guitarist he played chords other folk musicians hardly knew existed. He called Grazer's voice "soft and easy," though, untrained.

The Web site www.bobdylanroots.com published a letter from Peter Grazer, reportedly the son of then-83-year-old Tom Glazer from May

23, 1998.

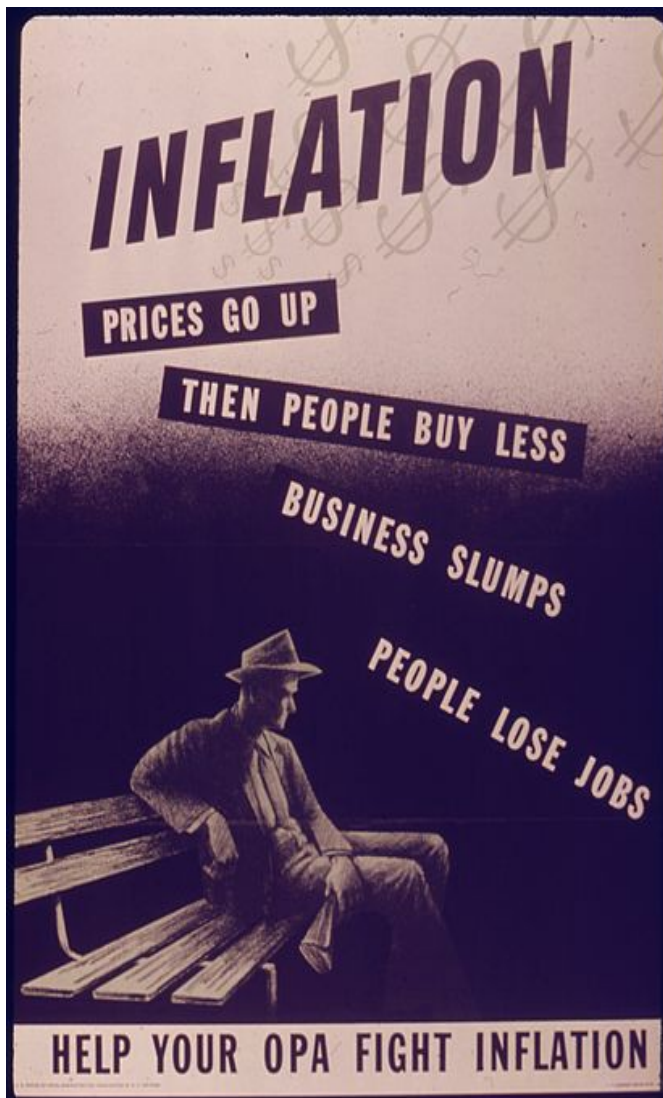
My father, Tom Glazer, now 83, wrote the "Inflation Talking Blues" which appears on your site, among the various lyrics you include. I came upon it while surfing, and had never heard of it.

I called him, and when I recited the lyric, he remembered it well, but hadn't thought of it in years. He was pretty amazed to hear it was "out there."

Grazer's "Talking Lobbyist" was originally published in special issue (supplement to No. 3, Apr-May 1946 issue) of "People's Songs" against the proposed abolition of the Office of Price Administration. In addition to Grazer, Pete Seeger and other folksingers sang to "Save the OPA"

The Office of Price Administration (OPA) was established by Executive Order 8875 on August 28, 1941 to regulating prices and rents to combat wartime inflation. The OPA was also tasked with regulating and rationing scarce consumer goods like cars and sugar, gas and rubber. In 1947, President Truman warned against abolishing the OPA; "Some business may be tempted to substitute for this large-range war-time thinking, a short-range policy designed to secure prices high enough to provide immediate profits," he said.

The OPA was abolished on May 29, 1947, by the General Liquidation Order issued March 14, 1947, by the OPA Administrator.



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Dylan's version was recorded by Cleve Pettersen at Bob Dylan's apartment on 15th Avenue S.E. This is the tape that Pettersen donated to the Minnesota Historical Center Library in 2004. (See *Petersen Tape*) It has often been mislabeled as "Talkin' Inflation Blues." It has been speculated that Dylan's familiarity with the song came from the discussed 1958 Folkways' John Greenway LP "Talking Blues"—the same record that contained "Talking Columbia," "Talking Sailor" and the "Original Talking Blues." It is of note that Greenway's version is, indeed, titled "Talking Inflation," though it is very much the same song as Grazer's "Talking Lobbyist."

Several releases of Dylan's version have the song sped up half a step or two from the original performance. This leads to artificial youthfulness to Dylan's already youthful voice. This of course also changes the key of the guitar. The speed corrected version somehow presents Dylan as more confident and instantly more recognizable as early Dylan. He executes a very cool ascending scale guitar flourish at the end of the song showing the Dylan already had a better control of his instrument than many of his older recordings reveal.

Talking Hugh Brown

Written by: Bob Dylan

Recorded at 15th Ave. S.E. Minneapolis, MN

From the Cleve Pettersen Tape, Recorded September 1960.

Minneapolis, MN

Official releases: Unreleased

Unofficial releases: I Was So Much Younger Then

(Scouser/Dandelion) 2000, Number One (n.l) 1987

Talking Hugh Brown is another song from the recently discovered original Cleve Pettersen Source Tape (see *Red Rosey Bush*). This song has been called *Bob Dylan's first song* and in 2005 the Minneapolis Bridgeland News calls it *Dylan's earliest known tape*. However, Dylan's *Hey Little Richard*, *Big Black Train* and *When I Got Troubles* were all recorded a year or two before *Hugh Brown*. One can surmise that at the time those statements were made, it was, perhaps, Dylan's earliest known recordings. It wasn't until August 30th, 2005 that Dylan's earliest known commercially released composition *When I Got Troubles* was released on *The Bootleg Series 7: No Direction Home* and the *Petersen Tape* was donated to the Minnesota Historical Society Library on or around early January 2005 and it had been circulating on various bootlegs as "The Minnesota Party Tape" among other names for years beforehand. Like a lot of things in Dylan lore, tapes, dates and composers are often fraught with inconsistencies. Today.com quotes Bonnie Wilson, curator at the Minnesota Historical Society in 2004 as saying "The surfacing of this original recording should correct all the rumors and speculation circulating on the Internet and within the circles of Dylan followers and music critics."

The song itself features Dylan calling Hugh Brown a lazy bastard and espousing why this is so. Musically, it is very much a *Talking Blues* number though it has somewhat of an improvisational feel to it. Brown, a resident of Seward, MN (one of the most politically liberal communities in Minneapolis), said he wasn't even aware of the song's existence until 2002-2003. He said he was not present when the *Pettersen Tape* was recorded.

Hugh Brown, a musician and artist in his own right, was said to be an early influence on Dylan's guitar playing. He's credited as being one of the first Dinkytown musicians to play the blues. Dylan even lived with Brown for a few months in a two story house at 711 15th Ave. SE. If anyone would know if someone was a lazy bastard, it'd be his roommate and, Dylan said, he never closed the window.

Talking Fish Blues

AKA Talking Fishing Blues, Talking Fisherman Blues

Written by: Woody Guthrie

Indian Neck Folk Festival, Branford, Ct, May 6, 1961

Official releases: Unreleased

Unofficial releases: I Was So Much Younger Then

(Scouser/Dandelion) 2000, From Minnesota to New York

(Wonderland) 2009, Young Zimmerman (n.l) n.d., Where Are You
Now My Blue Eyed Son (Wonderland) 2008.

Talking Fish Blues or (as Guthrie had it published: *Talking Fishing Blues*) is one of three Guthrie songs a young Bob Dylan played at the May 6, 1961 Indian Neck Folk Festival (see *Talking Columbia* for more details on the festival). In fact, Dylan only performed three songs and they were all Woody's. The tape has been called Dylan's earliest live performance tape. The festival was held at Montowesi Hotel in Branford, Connecticut.

Dylan influencer and contemporary folksinger Eric Von Schmidt is said to have said: "The first time I heard about Dylan was through Robert L. Jones, who was my brother-in-law. Robert was a good singer and he was invited down to the Indian Neck Folk Festival that year and when it was over he came back and he said: 'Hey, there's this guy down there you really gotta hear. Bob Dylan, he sounds like Woody Guthrie and he sings these funny songs.'"

The Guthrie version can be found on the Folkway's collection *This Land Is Your Land: The Asch Recordings, Vol. 1*. It appears to be about an alcoholic womanizer who also happens to be the worst fisherman in the world. The singer puts a saddle on a sleeping catfish and rides him like a horse and at one point he forgets that he's got a baited hook because he's far too busy with his woman at his side. It's a mid to slow temp *Talking Blues* number and the phrasing recalls Dylan's *Bear Mountain* and especially *Freewheelin's I Shall Be Free*. Like in *Talking Bear Mountain Picnic Massacre Blues*, dog's a-barkin' make an appearance. The song is funny and clever. It was even suggested to be "the funniest Talking Blues song" by some members of the Internet traditional music hub mudcat.org. Dylan's

performance is competent if shy. However, with a performance that only featured Guthrie songs, it's not surprising people would write off a young Dylan as a mere Woody Guthrie clone. This perception will change soon enough.

Another excellent reading of this song is found on Logan English's fine Monitor Records 1962 album *American Folk Ballads*. On *Ballads*, English recorded several Guthrie songs. English, a folksinger and actor for Kentucky, was an avid Guthrie aficionado and an influence on early Dylan. In John Bauldie's book *Wanted Man: In Search of Bob Dylan*, English's widow Barbara Shutner recalled, "My husband Logan English and I met Bob Dylan at Bob and Sid Gleason's house. One night we were all sitting around and Woody said something like, "Play something" to this kid sitting on the couch. The kid was Bob Dylan, and he sang and it was just beautiful. So Logan said, "I'm working at Gerde's [Gerde's Folk City, Greenwich Village, NY]. I'm the MC. We'll get you to play there." So that Monday night, Bob came in and did his first set." English died in 1983. He was hit by a car while walking. He was just 54-years-old.

Talkin' Devil

Written by: Bob Dylan

Released under the pseudonym *Blind Boy Grunt*

Recorded in Broadside's cramped New York apartment. January 19, 1963

Official releases: Broadside Ballads Vol. 1 (Folkways, 1963)

Unofficial releases: Blind Boy Grunt (TMQ, 1983), Great White Wonder (TMQ, 1963), New York Songs 1962 (One Media iP Ltd, N.D)

Talkin' Devil is a short two verse song clocking under one minute. It is one of several songs to appear on the inaugural edition of Folkways Records *Broadside Ballads*. Dylan performs here under the pseudonym *Blind Boy Grunt*. *Talkin' Devil* is one of five Dylan songs to appear on the compilation. He recorded three songs as Grunt and *Let Me Die In My Footsteps* with Happy Traum. A version of *Blowin' in the Wind* by The New World Singers also appears on the LP.

As for the the persona of *Blind Boy Grunt*, it has been suggested that the moniker was adopted to avoid conflict with Columbia Records. Dylan continued to use the name sporadically in 1963.

Its use wasn't limited to that 1963 Broadside album, either. In early 1963, Grunt showed up on the self-titled Folkways LP by Richard "Dick" Farina and Eric Von Schmidt. Throughout 1962 and 1963, Dylan recorded a dozen or more songs for the Broadside magazine. Culled from these low-key sessions, several of these songs, again attributed to Grunt, appeared on the 1972 Folkways Release: Broadside Reunion.

Talkin' Devil is a real chestnut amongst Dylan compositions. If not for it's substance for its rarity. It is an officially released Bob Dylan composition but, as of this writing, it still appears on no official Columbia release. It isn't attributed on his Web site and it has even remained unpublished in every edition of *Lyrics*—the mammoth official book of Dylan songs.

The Smithsonian Folkways site describes Broadside Ballads Vol. 1

thusly: *with topical songs that vary in subject from civil rights to Vietnam and the nuclear arms race, Broadside Ballads, Vol. 1 is at once a staunch and elucidating account of a generation at odds with the world around it.*

The liner notes to the compilation were written by Gordon Friesen who along with wife Agnes Sis Cunningham were the founders of Broadside.

Regarding *Talkin' Devil*, Friesen wrote: “*As for the Devil, he started out by giving the first man ever created a snow job and hasn't stopped talking since.*”

In Clinton Heylen's book *Revolution in the Air*, Heylen says it is of note that Dylan's (via Grunt) assertion that the devil is real predates *the conversion* by 15 years. In Robert Shelton's *No Direction Home*, Shelton calls *Talkin' Devil* a “work in progress.” He suggests that Dylan's intent was to spotlight the *hidden devils on Earth*. Bert Cartwright, author of *The Bible in the Lyrics of Bob Dylan*, called it a song of “questionable quality.” He wrote that this song is an early example as to the important role *the devil* would play in Dylan's words and life to come. This idea that the devil as a con man or man as the devil is a theme that would be later explored in songs like *Man of Peace*. Not all find the song expendable. Italian language music site www.antiwarsongs.org called *Talkin' Devil* *una canzone ed un commento che valgono anche per oggi* (or, roughly, *a song and a comment that are also valid for today*.) A song with obvious allusions to the Ku Klux Klan, religiosity and warmongering/gun violence might not age well but Dylan is sincere and not trite.

Dylan (by way of Grunt) ends the song with a blues lick and says “that's just two verses to it.” Whether he is saying that the song is only two verses long or that that was just two verses of a longer composition is unknown. However, the sentiment in the song is expressed well in this stark version. The length almost makes the song more poignant. The shortness gives Blind Boy an almost shy *out* as if he's saying “*or something like that.*” Though often associated with more lighthearted numbers, especially in Dylan's use, the Talking Blues style is quite well-suited for this type of more serious composition. One wonders what the reception to the “gospel

period” would have been if Dylan incorporated these types of musical elements. However, by 1979 Dylan had moved far beyond recording Talking Blues numbers.

Talking Columbia

Written by: Woody Guthrie

Hugh Browne's apartment Minneapolis, Mn, Sep 1960; *recorded by Bonnie Beecher*

Indian Neck Folk Festival, Brantford, Ct, May 6, 1961

Official releases: Unreleased

Unofficial releases: The Forgotten Sessions 1962-1963 (Sessions) 2017, Ten Million a Week (Hollow Horn) 2007, I Was So Much Younger Then (Scouser/Dandelion) 2000, From Minnesota to New York (Wonderland) 2009

Originally surfacing on the September 1960 *Minnesota University Tape*, Dylan would revisit Woody Guthrie's *Talkin' Columbia* during his appearance at the Indian Neck Folk Festival May 6, 1961 in Branford, CT at the Montowesi Hotel. The former is a mere snippet where Dylan is apparently distracted by good-natured hooting and hollering from those in attendance. Musically, this is instantly recognizable as early Dylan. Some have said Dylan was imitating Guthrie, but he has as much character in his own voice to being making these songs his own. Dylan segues into another Guthrie tune *Talkin' Merchant Marine* after a mere 41 seconds.

The Indian Neck Folk Festival began in 1957. Organized by two Yalies, it featured the wonderful Logan English, Odetta and others. The festival was revived in 1960 as a non-profit insider-only event with 450 invitation only guests in attendance. In his book *A History of Folk Music Festivals in the United States: Feasts of Musical Celebration*, author Ronald D. Cohen quotes 1960 festival organizers as saying the festival "is run for people with a vested interest in the field because we feel this kind of thing helps to preserve the *esprit de corps* of people in folk music and thus will help keep folk alive, young and old always growing as it should be." The 1960 festival attracted the likes of Carolyn Hester, Eric Von Schmidt and others. The next year's festival included an unknown young folkie performing a short set of just three songs. His name was Bob Dylan and the songs were all Woody Guthrie covers. Dylan's performance is well received by those in attendance, but on existing tapes from the 1961 performance, Dylan's vocals are almost too quiet to hear. *Indian*

Neck is often cited as *Bob Dylan's* first performance—although he is known to have performed prior to this date at St. Paul's *The Purple Onion Inn/Purple Onion Pizza Parlor* and other possible locales throughout Minnesota.

In 1941, American film director Gunther von Fritsch was making a documentary about the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam. Knowing von Fritsch's project was in need of a narrator, folklorist Alan Lomax suggested Woody Guthrie. Although this never came to fruition, The Department of the Interior hired Guthrie to write songs about the modern marvels of construction, hydro-electric dams, and the the Columbia River. Facing opposition from private utilities, those in the government hoped that folk songs would bring more public support to the projects. According to author Ed Cray's 2004 book *Ramblin Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie*, Guthrie remarked about his time in Pacific Northwest: "it's a paradise." Guthrie was chauffeured around in a '41 Hudson Hornet and was eventually paid \$266.66 for his services. Seventeen of the songs he would write during his one month on the Columbia were released as the Folkways album "Columbia River Ballads" (Now known as "Columbia River Collection"). Those *Columbia Ballads* would go on to become some of Guthrie's best known songs.

Talking Columbia is one of those Guthrie songs where you can't tell if he's making fun of his benefactors or being sincere. He says that Uncle Sam needs *stuff to eat*. One wonders what those who hired Guthrie in the Department of the Interior made of his often tongue-in-cheek lyrics. The great Midwest prognosticator, Guthrie makes the proclamation midway through the songs that someday everything's going to be made out of plastic. Dylan's Indian Neck performance begins after a brief introduction and a small smattering of applause. Dylan's version is more similar to Guthrie's rollicking version found on *The Ashe Recordings* than the more introspective version found on *Columbia River Collection*. Although a few of the lyrics and a verse are absent when Dylan sings, the crowd is much more receptive when the song finished.

VD Songs

Written by Woody Guthrie

12/22/61 Bonnie Beecher's Apartment

Dinkytown, MN

Available on: a Bob Dylan *VD City* 78-rpm is included with *Woody Guthrie: American Radical Patriot* (2013) Rounder Records

Unofficial releases: The Minnesota Hotel Tape: *Bonnie Beecher's Apartment, December 22, 1961* (1994) Wanted Man, "Ten of Swords" (1985) Tarantula Records, "Great White Wonder" (1969) Trademark of Quality, "The Early Years Vol 2" (1995) Winged Wheel *among others*.

VD Blues, VD City, VD Waltz and VD Gunner's Blues

In 1949, Woody Guthrie was commissioned by the U.S. Public Health Service to write a series of *Juke Box Songs to Fight Syphilis*. With titles like *VD Day*, *VD Seaman's Blues* and *A Child of VD*, Guthrie explored the consequences of bedding loose women, rotting to death, coming to terms with your venereal disease and, of course, getting *that old siff*. The complete set of Guthrie's VD songs were released in 2013 on *Woody Guthrie: American Radical Patriot. Patriot*, a six CD set that includes book, a DVD, a 258-page PDF, over 85 songs and a 78-rpm vinyl record of Dylan's version of *VD City* from the December 22, 1961 "Minnesota Hotel Tape."

According to the man Dylan called "The King of Folksingers" Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Elliott himself taught Dylan these obscure numbers. "Those old VD songs by Woody that nobody wanted the kids to know," he said, "he picked them up from me." It's possible. The pair apparently met in late 1961 while visiting hero Guthrie on ward 40 of Greystone Hospital in Parsippany, NJ where Guthrie was suffering from Huntington's disease. "The very first person I met when I came back from Europe was Bob Dylan. I met him while we were visiting Woody in the hospital," Elliott said. "I met Bob Dylan right there in the hospital," he said. "He was still doing a lot of traditional songs, great old Jimmie Rodgers songs, railroad blues. Most everybody couldn't stand his voice, because it was way out of

control,” Elliott told the San Francisco Chronicle in 1998. “And he was going through puberty. Couldn't even grow a beard. He was a cute kid, though. He looked like a poet.” Elliott's friends accused Dylan of stealing Elliott's style but Elliot, himself, said he felt honored. According to Woody's daughter Nora, Dylan and friends were frequent visitors to Greystone. “[Bob] went to the hospital quite a lot,” Nora said. “He was a doll to our family.”

The VD songs appear on the famous “Minnesota Hotel Tapes” —a collection of songs recorded when Bob was in Minnesota in 1961. (see *The Minnesota Hotel Tapes*) Recorded without accompaniment, *The VD songs* display Dylan as Guthrie and Guthrie as a 1940s sex-ed propaganda machine, only instead of fascists, *This Machine Kills STDs*.

V.D. Blues: Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

Blues seems to tell the story of a man that went sailing and came home with a venereal disease. Thus, he has the VD blues and they're not great.

V.D. Gunner Blues: Words and Music by Woodie Guthrie

The singer in *VD Gunner Blues* doesn't just have the blues from venereal diseases, he has a plans to murder the woman who infected him. The song ends with the singer being shot in the back by a sheriff's deputy.

V.D. Waltz: Words and music by Woody Guthrie

This is a song about denial. The inflicted refuses to acknowledge that his rash is an STD.

V.D. City: Words by Woody Guthrie, Music by Will Johnson

A much more fleshed out concept. Here Guthrie writes of “Syph Street” and “Clap Avenue”. He tells of life in insane asylums and *human wrecks*. The jovial nature of the other songs is nowhere to be found here. Here, VD is bad and I don't want it.

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